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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANAA 002942

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/23/2014

TAGS: [PBTS](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [ER](#) [YM](#)

SUBJECT: VP HADI SHARES ROYG CONCERNS ABOUT ERITREA

Classified By: Ambassador Thomas C. Krajewski for reason 1.4 b and d.

11. (C) Summary. Vice President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi convoked Ambassador on November 23 to express ROYG concerns over a November 21 exchange of gunfire between Yemeni troops and four suspected Eritrean military boats off the Yemeni Hunaish Islands. Hadi pressed Ambassador for information on what the USG knew of the incident, and of a potential Eritrean military build-up off the Eritrean coast. Ambassador responded by stressing the importance of continued USG-ROYG military cooperation, and said that the USG would do all it could to maintain calm in the area. End Summary.

12. (C) On November 23 Ambassador, accompanied by DATT, COMC, and Pol/EconOff (notetaker) met with Yemeni Vice President Abu Rabbu Mansour Hadi at the Ministry of Defense. Hadi expressed ROYG concern over a November 21 incident involving three to four small, unidentified military boats fired on by Yemeni troops as they approached the island of Greater Hunaish. (Note: Yemen and Eritrea almost went to war over the Hunaish Islands in 1995. The USG played a vital role in allaying tensions between the two nations. End Note). Hadi also said that one or two unidentified, military capable helicopters have twice approached the island since the incident. He asked if the USG knew the identity of the helicopters and boats. (Note: Hadi expressed suspicion that one of the helicopters was on a French reconnaissance mission. The French did not reply to a ROYG inquiry on the matter. End Note).

13. (C) DATT told the VP that on November 22 he asked the Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) about the incident. CJTF-HOA confirmed that a French ship fifty kilometers north of the island aided a small Eritrean military boat with nine passengers on board. The nine passengers, who requested water, food and fuel, admitted to stealing the boat from Eritrea, claiming they were destined for Saudi Arabia. DATT said he too suspected the other boats were Eritrean, but could not confirm this. There were no U.S. or Coalition reports of aircraft sighted in the vicinity of the Islands.

14. (C) Hadi told Ambassador the ROYG was concerned about a suspected military build up of 10,000 troops at Ras Therma, Eritrea. Ambassador replied that he had no knowledge of such a buildup, but that the USG would continue to focus on maintaining calm in the area. Hadi emphasized the sensitivity of the Hunaish Islands to the ROYG. The ROYG acted in full compliance with international law, said the VP, as well as with the utmost restraint. Hadi expressed ROYG frustration with Eritrea's behavior, referring to it as a "thawra" (revolution) rather than "dawla" (country), "They fight with everyone," he quipped.

15. (C) Hadi attributed the ROYG's ability to act with restraint to its military cooperation with the USG in the Bab-al-Mandab straits, confiding that the ROYG does not fully monitor its coast due to confidence in the U.S. presence in HOA. He asked that the USG exert pressure on Eritrea to provide liaison officers to CJTF-HOA, and to act within internationally recognized standards. Ambassador assured the VP that he would express his concerns to Washington and CJTF-HOA in Djibouti.

16. (C) Comment: A plausible explanation for the incident is that the stolen military boat was being pursued by the Eritrean military, which therefore came close to the Hunaish Islands. The meeting with Hadi, and particularly the urgency with which it was called, underscores the fragility of the ROYG's relations with Eritrea, and the mistrust that prevails. End Comment.

KRAJESKI